

**Capability Assessment for Readiness (CAR):
Assessing the Capabilities and Readiness of Emergency Management**

Clair Blong
Chief, International Affairs Unit
Preparedness, Training and Exercises Directorate,
Federal Emergency Management Agency

ABSTRACT

The capability assessment for readiness is a process designed to collect, analyze, track and report quantitative national and state level emergency management readiness data for decision-making related to emergency response to natural and technological emergencies. This project is a joint FEMA and National Emergency Management Association initiative that examines thirteen critical emergency functions and provides an assessment of the vital characteristics for each function. It is an excellent tool for improving disaster response readiness and the World Bank and other international institutions are currently examining it for possible use in building emergency management capabilities in other countries.

Capability Assessment for Readiness (CAR): Assessing the Capabilities and Readiness of Emergency Management

FEMA Contacts: **Dr. Clair Blong (clair.blong@fema.gov)**
 Mr. Jeffrey Glick (jeff.glick@fema.gov)

Capability Assessment for Readiness answers one of the most basic questions of society, "Are we ready for the disasters that may befall us?" Have we developed effective preparedness policies, exercised appropriate mitigation practices, and are we ready to respond and then recover following a disaster?

Prior to 1996, emergency management officials in the United States lacked a nationally accepted process and criteria by which States, Territories and Insular Areas (hereafter referred to as States) could judge their emergency management readiness and capabilities. As a result, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Emergency Management Association, an organization composed of all State emergency managers, joined together in partnership to develop a readiness and capability assessment process for State emergency managers. The development of this system was coordinated by FEMA's Preparedness, Training, and Exercises Directorate and involved all FEMA Regional and Headquarter Offices and every State in the country. The result of this large-scale effort was the State Capability Assessment for Readiness (CAR).

The State CAR is self-assessment process focusing on 13 Emergency Management Functions. These functions were identified by emergency managers from across the country and address the full range of critical emergency management areas required to ensure effective mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery from disasters. These 13 Emergency Management Functions are:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| * Laws and Authorities | * Operations & Procedures |
| * Hazard Identification/Risk Assessment | * Logistics and Facilities |
| * Hazard Management | * Training |
| * Resources management | * Exercises |
| * Planning | * Public Education & Information |
| * Direction, Control & Coordination | * Finance/Administration |
| * Communications & Warning | |

Each Emergency Management Function is subdivided into attributes and these attributes are further divided into characteristics. Attributes are composed of broad criteria by which the Emergency Management Function can be assessed. Characteristics are more detailed criteria that clarify each of the attributes. Emergency managers realized that only by providing two levels of assessment below each Emergency Management Function could they define the Function in fine enough detail to specify a measurable capability. It is this measurable capability that enables the State CAR to serve as strategic planning and budgeting tool.

Attributes and characteristics under each Emergency Management Function are scored on a scale of 1 to 5 to provide a quantitative rating. The rating for each Emergency Management Function is derived by averaging the respective attribute scores. The specific scale used in the State CAR was developed at the request of emergency managers and in close coordination with the National Emergency Management Association. It is defined as follows:

1. Not capable: No progress has been achieved.
 2. Marginally Capable: Some progress has been achieved, but a substantial amount of effort is required to reach full capability.
 3. Generally Capable: A baseline capability has been developed, but significant effort is required to reach full capability.
 4. Very Capable: A high level of capability has been attained and only a limited effort is required to reach full capability.
 5. Fully Capable: A full capability has been achieved and only maintenance is required.
- NA. Not Applicable: The capability being discussed is not required for this State.

The State CAR is a dynamic process involving State officials from key offices and departments throughout the State government (e.g., highways, health, welfare, police and fire), as well as from the office of emergency management. Successful completion of the State CAR process is dependent on State emergency managers having conducted a threat/hazard and vulnerability analysis so that they can more accurately define the threats and hazards they face, their approximate chance of occurrence and their State's vulnerability to them. In States, there are many potential hazards and threats, from ones that are of high frequency, but low impact (e.g., small flooding, forest fires) to hazards that are low frequency, but high impact (e.g., catastrophic earthquake, terrorism incident).

Given the threats and hazards each State confronts, emergency managers need to examine the State's emergency capabilities against the attributes and characteristics of the State CAR, thereby developing a "self-profile" of the strengths and weaknesses in its emergency management program. This profile enables States to effectively target their program resources to those areas in their emergency management program in greatest need. In addition, States have the information they need for strategic planning and for justifying program and resource requirements or new initiatives.

Often the State CAR process is conducted with Federal emergency management staff in attendance to ensure the close coordination and cooperation of State and Federal government emergency assets and personnel. Together, the participants in the State CAR process develop and refine their shared vision of emergency management in the State and steps required to insure rapid, effective Federal assistance should it become necessary.

There is substantial support by States for the State CAR process. In 1996, all States completed the State CAR process and instrument (100% return rate). A national report was prepared in 1997 based on the data obtained and this report was provided to the President, the United States Congress, and the public. Since the issuance of the State CAR, it has undergone significant revision based on a series of Federal/Regional and State Customer Feedback Workshops designed to enhance the instrument and the entire process. The revised and improved State CAR instrument and process will be issued for completion by all States early in the year 2000.

The State CAR is fully automated allowing State emergency managers to quickly and flexibly use the data from their State CAR to set priorities, plan strategically and explain the State's emergency management capabilities and needs to their governor, State legislatures and the public. In conjunction with the year 2000 issuance will be new computer features that will make the State CAR easier to use, more powerful and help insure that different responders will interpret the same attributes and characteristics the same way. The State CAR will remain in the popular Windows, menu driven format. However, there will be more choices, clearly identifiable and they will provide the State user with not only the ability to manipulate the data easily, but also draw important conclusions and then describe those conclusions in tables and charts.

New automated support features will also include a companion CD-ROM "Toolbox" providing expanded explanations of questions and concepts contained in the State CAR, as well as background materials. An expanded on-line Help Screen will guide the user through completing the instrument and a detailed Facilitation Guide will offer guidance and suggestions for conducting the assessment process.

Of important note is the recent development of a draft Local CAR instrument and process for use by cities and counties throughout the United States. This Local CAR complements the State CAR and was recently developed by FEMA at the request of National Emergency Managers Association. The Local CAR will enable jurisdictions throughout the States to conduct emergency management self-assessments. For standardization purposes, the Local CAR uses the common software of the State CAR along with the same 13 Emergency Management Functions and the same scoring system. However, the Local CAR allows for some customization of the instrument within these 13 Emergency Management Functions to suit the needs and requirements of specific local jurisdictions. This Local CAR initiative will evolve over the next few years and become an integral part of, and complement to the State emergency management capability assessment.

The development of the Local CAR is of particular importance in that many localities (e.g., Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City) have substantial emergency management assets and capabilities. It is only by accounting for major local assets as well as State assets that State emergency managers can truly determine what are the State-wide emergency management resources, capabilities and needs. It is developing this holistic view of emergency management that is ultimately at the core of the CAR process.